NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0516 APRIL 6, 1976
JOHN BUE/PARIS

FRANCO-EGYPTIAN MILITARY COOPERATION

ANNCR:

FOLLOWING EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT'S MEETING IN PARIS WITH FRENCH PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING, OBSERVERS ARE WONDERING TO JUST WHAT EXTENT FRANCE IS WILLING TO TAKE CARE OF EGYPT'S MILITARY NEEDS NOW THAT THE FLOW OF SOVIET ARMS SUPPLIES HAD DRIED UP. FROM PARIS, VOA'S JOHN BUE DISCUSSES THE QUESTION.

VOICE:

ON LEAVING THE ELYSEE PALACE AFTER HIS SECOND TALKS WITH THE FRENCH PRESIDENT, THE EGYPTIAN LEADER WAS ASKED WHETHER HE FEELS CONVINCED FRANCE WILL GO ALL THE WAY IN ASSISTING EGYPT WITH EVERYTHING IT NEEDS BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND MILITARILY. PRESIDENT SADAT ANSWERED THAT HE WAS SURE, WITHOUT ANY DOUBT. HOWEVER, NEITHER EGYPTIAN NOR FRENCH LEADERS HAVE SPECIFIED EXACTLY WHAT EGYPT IS EXPECTING IN THE WAY OF FRENCH MILITARY AID.

AT THE END OF LAST YEAR, PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO CAIRO. ON THIS OCCASION, A JOINT COMMUNIQUE SAID FRANCE RESPONDS FAVORABLY TO EGYPT'S DESIRE TO HAVE IT CONTRIBUTE THROUGH ITS TECHNOLOGICAL KNOW-HOW AND EXPERIENCE TO THE SETTING UP, IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER ARAB STATES, OF AN ARMS INDUSTRY IN EGYPT. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING CONFIRMED THIS AT A CAIRO NEWS CONFERENCE.

SINCE THEN, THE CHIEF OF THE EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE HAS SPENT A WEEK IN FRANCE, FOLLOWED BY THE DEFENSE MINISTER WHO SPENT TEN DAYS TOURING INSTALLATIONS AND TALKING WITH

HIS FRENCH COUNTERPART. HE CONFIRMED THAT A PROGRAM OF OBJECTIVES FOR MILITARY COOPERATION HAD BEEN AGREED UPON THAT COVERED SEVERAL YEARS.

QUESTIONED ON PRESIDENT SADAT'S CATEGORICAL STATEMENT ON LEAVING THE ELYSEE THIS WEEK, A SPOKESMAN CONFIRMED THAT FRANCE'S ECONOMIC AID TO EGYPT WOULD BE INCREASED THIS YEAR, BUT WITHOUT SPECIFYING BY HOW MUCH. ON MILITARY COOPERATION, HE REFERRED NEWSMEN BACK TO THE CAIRO COMMUNIQUE AND THE EGYPTIAN DEFENSE MINISTER'S VISIT TO FRANCE.

WHATEVER HAPPENS, THE FRENCH ATTITUDE OBVIOUSLY IS CHANGING. SHORTLY AFTER ASSUMING OFFICE, PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING DROPPED FORMER PRESIDENT DE GAULLE'S EMBARGO ON ARMS SALES TO SO-CALLED MIDDLE EAST BELLIGERENT NATIONS. ACCORDING TO FRENCH ARMS MANUFACTURERS, THE SO FAR VAGUE TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE PLANNED EGYPTIAN ARMAMENTS INDUSTRY MAY BE BACKED UP IN THE FUTURE BY DELIVERIES OF COMBAT PLANES. BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION OF THIS BY EITHER SIDE.

ONE FRENCH DAILY, LE FIGARO, REFLECTED RECENTLY ANXIETY AS TO WHETHER EGYPT COULD PAY FOR ARMS, SINCE IT OWES THE SOVIET UNION LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY ALREADY. THE EGYPTIAN DEFENSE MINISTER EXPLAINED IN A FRENCH PRESS INTERVIEW THAT ALL EGYPT IS ASKING FOR IS A SPREADING-OUT OF ITS DEBT REPAYMENTS.

IN ANY EVENT, THE FINAL SHAPE OF FRANCO-EGYPTIAN MILITARY COOPERATION IS THOUGHT LIKELY TO DEPEND LARGELY

UPON THE EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST ITSELF. PRESIDENT SADAT IS REGARDED IN FRANCE AS A MODERATE LEADER WHO IS GRADUALLY BUT STEADILY TRYING TO DE-FUSE WAR TENSIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THIS POLICY HAS CLEARLY BEEN AN INCENTIVE TO FRANCE TOWARD PARTLY FILLING THE BREACH LEFT OPEN BY THE SOVIET UNION. BUT FRANCE IS NOT LIKELY TO ENVISAGE BEARING THE MAJOR BRUNT OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY WHICH INVOLVES A WAGER ON EGYPT'S FUTURE POLICIES. DECISIONS BY THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN ON ASSISTANCE TO EGYPT ARE ALSO LIKELY TO WEIGH IN THE BALANCE FINALLY STRUCK BY THE FRENCH.

SO FAR, THE FRANCO-EGYPTIAN PLANS HAVE NOT SPARKED ANY MAJOR DOMESTIC CONTROVERSY.

GH/PBM